

May 23, 2019 - First Phone Call

Russel: Hello

Lauren: Hey, Russ.

Russel: Hi.

Lauren: How you doing?

Russel: I'm all right. How are you?

Lauren: I am all right. Um, the girls are all down, um, and so this is a good time to chat.

Russel: Okay. So where -

Lauren: I know it's late for you, so thanks for accommodating a later time to be after the time the girls go to bed.

Russel: Sure. Sure. So what are your thoughts, Lauren?

Lauren: Um, well, I feel like I might let you start because I feel like you might have more of an idea of what you want to say than I do -

Russel: Okay.

Lauren: Is that accurate?

Russel: Well, I mean, I (sigh) - I guess my first thought or question is how do you think the girls are going to respond to this?

Lauren: Um... So... Well, actually, maybe I should tell you something first. Uh, so, (inaudible) so, yesterday, after dinner, Ila asked me, totally out of the blue, um, she said, "Hey, Mom, when Dad gets out of jail, is he going to live us in this house, or are we going to move to a different house to live in together?" and I was, like, well, that's a good question. I don't know where she - how she arrived at that question, but she asked, and Natalie said, "I think I might know the answer to that." and I said, "Okay, do you want to talk to me about that?" and she said, "No, I just want to talk to you alone, without my sisters," and then Ila was, like, "I want to talk to Mom alone without my sisters." Oh, okay. And so, Ila went upstairs and I ... - yeah, someone came to visit me - to tell me that they found their - Natalie came to tell her that she found her stuffed animal in her bed. She's gone now though and the door is closed again. Um, and I said, "Okay, do you want to tell me what you're thinking there?" and she said, "Yeah, I think that Dad's probably not gonna live with us when he gets out of jail." and I said, "Well, you are right about that." and I said, "I don't know exactly where he is gonna live." I said, "There's a lot of things we just don't know yet still. Like, maybe he'll stay in Virginia, maybe he'll come out here to Utah,

like, I don't know all the details of what that look like." and she was asking some more questions about -

Russel: So, you've talked to her now about it.

Lauren: - how things are, and, I have, and I was not planning on it. Um, I was not planning on having that conversation yesterday, but -

Russel: I really think you should have waited, but okay...

Lauren: I'm sorry - well, Russ, here's the thing though - they were asking me questions and I couldn't lie to them.

Russel: You could say, "right now is not a good time to talk about it and we can talk about it later." I think that - but - okay. Well...

Lauren: (Deep breath) So, this is what I told her: I told her that the most important thing she needs to know are #1 - that her mom loves her very much and her dad loves her very much. #2 - that she always still has a mom and she always still has a dad. #3 - that decisions about - you know, for adults, about when they get married or who they live with or who they don't live with, those decisions are adult decisions and adults are the only ones that are involved in making those decisions, which means that kids didn't cause adults to make those decisions and that none of that is their fault or something that they participated in. And I just, you know, emphasized that the most important things for them to know and understand is that I love them and you love them and that they always have a dad and they always have a mom - whether or not their mom and dad live together.

Russel: You know, we were still told by the Courts not to talk about it yet. And I know the answer to the question -

Lauren: No -

Russel: Yes.

Lauren: No, well -

Russel: But, Lauren, I guess here are some of my concerns.

Lauren: Okay, If you're going to start getting, like -

Russel: No, I'm not. I'm just -

Lauren: No - I- I need, Russ, I need to say this or I'm going to hang up on you. Do you understand me?

Russel: I'm listening. Go ahead.

Lauren: Don't use that patronizing tone with me, Russ.

Russel: I'm not. I'm trying to remain calm, Lauren.

Lauren: You are. Okay. Here's the deal. Mike Nielsen is a lying, bad man. Okay? And he is abusive and cruel and mean. And if you start throwing around things like, the Court said not to talk about this, okay, well, I just - Russ, they asked a question about their family and I answered it. And also, that was the Commissioner's thought on it - The Judge then made a different ruling and it is fair for the children to know what's going on. I wasn't planning on talking to them about it. They asked a question - it came up in, like, their conversation - they were very insistent and it's because I tried to kind of deflect it like you suggested, and it wasn't working. Okay? And so, I wasn't planning on it, but they're old enough to ask questions and to think about things and it isn't unusual for either Natalie or Ila to randomly -

Russel: Can we talk - can we get back to the girls - about what we are doing for them. Because right now, we're focused all about your telling them, and frankly, -

Lauren: I wanted to tell you that I told them, because I think it's important. Um, -

Russel: You didn't lead with that -

Lauren: I - I said that at the beginning - I said -

Russel: After I -

Lauren: I said, "Wait, before you start" - I said, "I think it's important for you to know this - So let's start with this."

Russel: I said, "How do you think the girls will respond?" and then you told me. Lauren, I guess - here's one of my concerns -

Lauren: Russ - Okay - I'm telling you if you're going to fight with me I'm going to hang up - Do you understand?

Russel: You can hang up and that is your decision, but I am trying to work with you.

Lauren: Russ, if you would please - no, you're not trying to work with me. You're trying to yell at me about how I'm doing everything wrong -

Russel: Have I been yelling? -

Lauren: You know what? This isn't my fault. It's your fault. So I need you to keep that in mind.



Russel: You're right, Lauren, I made a bad decision, but you know what? You -

Lauren: You were a - no - you lived a double life and lied to me for years. That is what you did.

Russel: Lauren, -

Lauren: So, if we're going to talk about you did or didn't do, you need to say what you did - not, "I made a bad choice" -

Russel: I made bad choices -

Lauren: 'Cause that's not what happened.

Russel: (inaudible), Lauren, you made them too.

Lauren: Okay - you made bad choices - You're a deceptive liar.

Russel: Okay, Lauren, how did I treat you and the girls?

Lauren, Sadly, sadly, you treated terribly - you want to know why? Because you left us to be traumatized and abused and you've been gas-lighting me for the last year.

Russel: I've been what? - I didn't hear you.

Lauren: Gas-lighting me.

Russel: I'm sorry - I don't know what that means.

Lauren: Well, it's a term of abuse.

Russel: I have not been abusing you, Lauren. (inaudible)

Lauren: No, you have been abusing me. Okay? So, you have been, because you've been terrible to me throughout this entire process. Instead of saying, "You're right. I totally understand why you would want to divorce me and I am willing to work with you and thank you for being so reasonable in the ways you've done this." You have freaked out.

Russel: You have asked me to give up sole physical and legal custody with the girls, with essentially no recourse. You've asked me to go through -

Lauren: Russ, you left us! So you don't care!

Russel: Lauren -

Lauren: YOU LEFT US -

Russel: No, there's a difference between -

Lauren: And made me want everything back - No, there is not - you were not taken - you were not kidnapped - you left us.

Russel: I wasn't taken? -

Lauren: You were not taken, no.

Russel: Lauren... Lauren...

Lauren: You were not taken. You...left...us.

Russel: I understand that that's how you feel, but, but, guess what? There is a difference between making bad choices and being taken and saying, "I'm done - I'm walking out." I didn't do the latter.

Lauren: You did - By your choices, you did, Russ. Your choices have consequences.

Russel: Sure. And you know what? Here's some of the other consequences of choices - I still made the decision to try to do everything I could while we were married and even after -

Lauren: That's - that's not talking about consequences. Let's talk about consequences.

Russel: Okay. (inaudible)

Lauren: Every single thing that's happened in the last 2 years has been a consequence of your behavior.

Russel: Yes, you're right. It's from my behavior.

Lauren: All of it -

Russel: But you have agency, and you have made choices of your own. And those choices -

Lauren: Yeah, I have - all of which have come as a result of your behavior.

Russel: So -

Lauren: Russ, I didn't make other choices in a vacuum.

Russel: I don't feel like -

Lauren: You can't say that there's, like, no correlation - not even correlation - there's causation, Russ. If - these things didn't happen independently of each other.

Russel: Okay, Lauren, I understand where you're coming from. But I think - Do you think I want to be away from you and the girls?

Lauren: Uh, no. I think you wanted to get away with fraud.

Russel: Do you think that my behavior in both loving you and supporting you and trying to do the right things with you - even though I had made bad choices - I admit that - but do you think that I somehow don't care about you and the girls at all?

Lauren: Correct - I think you care about yourself.

Russel: So, when I would provide -

Lauren: Okay - I think you're trying to trap me -

Russel: No - I'm trying to understand something, Lauren -

Lauren: - trap me in Court.

Russel: No, I'm not trying to - Lauren -

Lauren: (something about using this conversation against her in court)

Russel: Look, you already got your divorce. You can move on and now you can date - you can find a replacement - that's what you've wanted. You can go and get someone -

Lauren: I can find a replacement? Russ, that is not what this is about. I wanted a divorce because I no longer wanted to be married to a man who left me.

Russel: Lauren, do you realize that I'm actually - that I will be getting out.

Lauren: Great - that's fine. But you left me and you betrayed me - so that doesn't really have impact on that.

Russel: Look, I understand that I caused a tremendous amount of damage, and that you are hurting. I get that. Do you understand that I not only understand it, but it hurts me knowing that I've done that?

Lauren: Okay. I appreciate you telling me that - I wouldn't know that by your actions - which have been to be cruel to me.

Russel: Lauren, (sigh) I don't - please don't -

Lauren: Don't give me this sigh, like you're taking some higher road here.

Russel: What do you mean, "a higher road?" All I've tried to do is express my feelings. Okay?

Lauren: Okay - go ahead.

Russel: I made bad choices. I admit that. Now, I wasn't trying to make bad choices just to somehow hurt you. It did. It did clearly. Okay? I get that. I didn't leave you. I was taken. My bad choices - but, Lauren, I wish every day that I were with you and the girls, and that we could repair what was broken and move forward. I sent a letter a couple of days ago, before we even talked, but - I'm sure that you'll get it soon, but, I talk a little bit about that. But, Lauren, I'm going to get out, and I'm going to want to be involved in the girls' lives. Okay?

Lauren: Okay. I've never said you can't do that - ever.

Russel: But, I feel like with a lot of the decisions that we're trying to work through, the behavior has been to try to remove me from them.

Lauren: No, Russ, I'm not trying to remove you from them. You removed yourself from them.

Russel: Based on what I can do, I feel like I'm not even able to do the most with what I have here in the interim until I get out. By the way, it'll probably hang up. Would you like me to try to call back in 15 minutes? I can probably do that one more time tonight.

Lauren: If you would like -